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Newport, R.I.**

**Mission Command and the United States Navy:
Overcoming Doctrinal Hurdles to Enable Mission Command**

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Paper Abstract

Current United States Navy command and control doctrine suppresses the development of the mission command approach to command and control advocated by the Joint force. By suppressing the development and implementation of mission command, Navy doctrine institutionalizes unnecessary decision-making costs that negatively impact an operational commander's ability to successfully employ forces to attack effectively first. The full implementation of mission command requires a revision of Navy command and control doctrine that fully aligns with the tenets of mission command to ensure that operational leaders can successfully employ their forces at 'the speed of the problem'. A revision of command and control doctrine is needed to provide the appropriate demand signal to the generating force required to select, train, and educate future Navy leaders capable of operating successfully under the auspices of mission command.

Introduction

As the tempo, scope, lethality, and scale of operations increased, these factors limited an operational commanders' ability to effectively react to changing battlefield conditions in an operationally relevant time-frame. Operational commanders employed mission command to regain the ability to observe, orient, decide, and act faster than an adversary, enabling the seizure and exploitation of the initiative. Although the recent emergence of robust communications networks enabled a resumption of 'detailed' command and control approaches, an increasing awareness of the vulnerability and fragility of networks and the limits of human cognition created a renewed impetus for mission command in the Joint force. Although the Joint force adopted mission command as its' preferred command and control approach, acceptance has been uneven and inconsistent across the services. Current Navy command and control doctrine provides a contemporary example.

The current United States Navy command and control doctrine suppresses the development of the mission command approach to command and control advocated by the Joint force. By suppressing the development and implementation of mission command, Navy doctrine institutionalizes unnecessary decision-making costs that negatively impact an operational commander's ability to successfully employ forces to attack effectively first. The full implementation of mission command requires a revision of Navy command and control doctrine that fully aligns with the tenets of mission command to ensure that operational leaders can successfully employ their forces at 'the speed of the problem'. A revision of command and control doctrine is needed to provide the appropriate demand signal to the generating force required to select, train, and educate future Navy leaders capable of operating successfully under the auspices of mission command.

The Evolution of Mission Command

Mission command evolved from the necessity to adapt to the changing nature of the 19th century battlefield.¹ Prior to the mid 19th century, operational commanders typically produced detailed pre-battle plans, observed the conduct of the battle as it unfolded, and adjusted their pre-planned actions through personal intervention as required. The vast experience of the operational commander, manifested in the concept of *coup d'oeil*, enabled the quick decision-making required to penetrate an adversary's decision cycle, present the horns of a dilemma, and effect victory.² As the increasing size, scope, and lethality of the modern battlefield increased force dispersion, operational commanders recognized the inadequacies of this 'detailed' command approach.³ Although the requirement to penetrate an adversaries' decision-cycle remained unchanged, environmental factors now precluded operational commanders from adjusting their pre-planned actions quickly enough to wrest the initiative from the enemy. The environment that enabled leaders like Wellington to observe the whole of a given battlefield, perceive the decisive point through his spyglass, and gallop off to personally direct the action, ceased to exist.⁴

Operational leaders developed a 'mission command' approach in recognition of this change. Disciplined subordinate initiative provided a means of mitigating the new challenges facing operational leaders, and 'mission command' provided the method of controlling that initiative. 'Mission command' sought to delegate decision-making authority to subordinate commanders better positioned to exploit changing local conditions in an

¹ John T. Nelsen. "Auftragstaktik: A Case for Decentralized Battle." *Parameters* 17, no. 3 (1987): 22.

² Carl von Clausewitz. *On War Revised Edition*, ed. Bernard Brodie, Peter Paret, and Michael Eliot Howard. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 141.

³ Nelsen. "Auftragstaktik: A Case for Decentralized Battle.", 22.

⁴ John Keegan. *The Mask of Command*. (New York, NY: Viking, 1987). 149.

operationally relevant time-frame.⁵ Delegating decision authority to individuals proximally located nearer the problem reduced the decisional transaction costs of communication, transmission, and comprehension that hindered a single commanders ability to make decisions at the speed of relevance.⁶ Operational commanders exercised control over subordinates by requiring that all actions support the commander's intent. The focus on delegated authority, controlled by intent, to reduce decision-related transaction costs represents the defining characteristic of 'mission command'.

Joint doctrine recognizes that a 'mission command' approach provides the most efficient system for reducing the costs of decision-making.⁷ Although recent advances in communication technology reduced the time and space factors that partly necessitated the implementation of 'mission command', these advances have yet to overcome the limits of human cognition.⁸ Despite the availability of systems and processes capable of aggregating the massive quantity of data required to make decisions in real-time, operational commanders can be easily overwhelmed trying to process all available information before making a decision.⁹ A 'mission command' approach allows for simultaneous decision-making at all levels of command, reducing the time required for decisions to process through multiple levels of command.¹⁰ By reducing the decisional transaction costs, a 'mission command' approach improves the likelihood of attacking effectively first, the key principle of ensuring

⁵ Nelsen. "Auftragstaktik: A Case for Decentralized Battle.", 23.

⁶ Thomas Feltey and John F. Madden. "The Challenge of Mission Command." *Military Review – Spotlight Article*, 27 August 2014, <http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/repository/spotlight/Feltey-Aug-2014.pdf>.

⁷ U.S. Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Joint Operations*. Joint Publication 3-0. (Washington, D.C.: CJCS, 11 August 2011), II-2.

⁸ Luck, Gary and Joint Staff Office of the Deputy Director J7. *Mission Command and Cross-Domain Synergy 2013* (Suffolk, VA: Joint Staff J7, 2013), 2.

⁹ Malcolm Gladwell. *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*. (Boston, MA: Little Brown and Company, 2005), Chapter 4.

¹⁰ Feltey and Madden. "The Challenge of Mission Command."

success in naval operations.¹¹ As the ability to attack effectively first is widely considered the most important principle of naval operations, naval command and control doctrine must provide the same benefits as a ‘mission command’ approach, or be revised to more closely resemble ‘mission command’.¹²

Does Mission Command Equal Command by Negation?

Current Navy and Joint doctrine publications assert that US Navy command and control doctrine is analogous to the Joint Force’s command philosophy of ‘mission command’ and, therefore, requires no revision. Navy doctrine claims that the Navy’s long history of independent command at sea, necessitated by the great distances and poor communications associated with operation on the high seas, institutionalized a culture that promoted decentralized execution.¹³ According to current naval doctrine, commanders utilize ‘command by negation’ to provide intent, and then trust subordinate commanders to execute decentralized operations.¹⁴ Even as the development of modern communication technology challenged the necessity for independent command at sea, subordinate commanders executing decentralized operations remained a key tenet of naval C2 philosophy.¹⁵ Naval doctrine asserts that just like the concept of ‘mission command’, the Navy’s concept of ‘command by negation’ enabled decentralized execution.¹⁶ Supposedly, according to current Navy doctrine, Navy C2 doctrine represents an analogous command

¹¹ U.S. Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Mission Command White Paper*. (Washington D.C.: CJCS, 2012), 3-4.

¹² Wayne P. Hughes Jr. *Fleet Tactics and Coastal Combat*. 2nd Edition. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2000), 40-44.

¹³ Carl H. Builder. *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 18.

¹⁴ US Office of the Chief of Naval Operations. *Maritime Operations at the Operational Level of War*. Navy Warfare Publication (NWP) 3-32. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, August 2012), 2-2.

¹⁵ US Office of the Chief of Naval Operations. *Naval Warfare*. Navy Doctrinal Publication (NWP) 1. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, March 2010), 36.

¹⁶ The term ‘command by negation’ refers to both the command philosophy of command by negation and the command and control system systems employed to operationalize the approach. In this case, the composite warfare commander construct serves as an operational manifestation of the command by negation philosophy.

philosophy that achieves the same ends as the joint concept of ‘mission command’, despite the difference in terminology.

Supporters of current naval command and control doctrine argue that any perceived incompatibility between Navy and Joint C2 doctrine stems from this inconsistency of terms. These proponents claim that the naval C2 doctrinal terminology of ‘command by negation’ evolved along a service-specific parallel track with Joint doctrine, eventually reaching the same destination. Naval doctrine argues, therefore, that ‘Command by negation’ describes the same approach to C2 as ‘mission command’; both mission command and command by negation are terms of art used to describe command philosophies that promote delegated authority centrally controlled by a commander’s vision.¹⁷ Joint doctrine seems to support this claim by utilizing the terms interchangeably to describe command and control systems encouraging “decentralized execution based on mission-type orders.”¹⁸

Recognizing that the inconsistent terms promoted potential friction in the Joint environment, senior Joint leaders specifically identified this apparent disconnect as a terminology mismatch, and not as a fundamental difference in approach to command and control. GEN Martin Dempsey, referencing ‘command by negation’ as a service-specific term in his 2012 *Mission Command White Paper*, stated that “variance in service doctrine are simply phrasing choices that express the same idea.”¹⁹ Similarly, GEN(Ret) Gary Luck argued that the composite warfare commander (CWC) concept employed by the Navy provides a service-specific example of C2 doctrine empowering decentralized operations in

¹⁷ James E. Higgins III. *Future Warfare and the Viability of Command by Negation*. (Newport, RI: Naval War College Joint Military Operations Department, 1996), 2.

¹⁸ U.S. Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Command and Control for Joint Maritime Operations*. Joint Publication (JP) 3-32, (Washington D.C.: CJCS, 7 August 2013), I-2.

¹⁹ U.S. Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Mission Command White Paper*, 3.

line with the principles of mission command.²⁰ Despite the use of differing service-specific terminology, joint maritime doctrine accepts mission command as the preferred method of command control, and recognizes the advantages accrued through its employment.²¹ Therefore, according to senior joint leaders, Navy-specific C2 concepts and ‘mission command’ are not contradictory, but analogous terms.

If ‘mission command’ and ‘command by negation’ represent the same approach to command and control as claimed by senior leaders and relevant doctrine, it stands that Navy C2 doctrine already seeks to minimize the decisional transaction costs associated with enabling operational commanders to strike effectively first. Doctrine states that Naval C2 practices promote the ability to attack effectively first by shaping the C2 system to promote rapid observation, orientation, decision, and action.²² According to some, ‘Command by negation’ effectively mitigates the risk of an operational commander being overwhelmed by the unmanageable volume of data the modern operating environment generates by empowering subordinate initiative.²³ Doctrine touts the CWC construct as an approach to synchronize warfighting areas to respond to specific enemy threats or capabilities more effectively than a single operational leader.²⁴ Based on these claims, Navy command and control doctrine already supports the development of a command and control system designed to minimize barriers to attacking effectively first.

Mission Command is more than Decentralized Execution

²⁰ Gary Luck. *Mission Command and Cross Domain Synergy 2013*, 1.

²¹ JP 3-32, II-1.

²² Ibid. Page II-1.

²³ Mark McManus. “United States Navy Command and Control Organization.” (Newport, RI: Naval War College, October 2011, 12.

²⁴ Ibid, page 10.

Despite the arguments detailed above, current US Navy command and control doctrine does differ significantly from the ‘mission command’ approach. The above argument rests on the viability of equating the dissimilar terms of ‘mission command’ and ‘command by negation’ through comparison of only one characteristic. Joint Publication 3-32 – *Command and Control for Joint Maritime Operations* – refers to ‘mission command’ and ‘command by negation’ as synonymous because both require “subordinate commanders to execute operations independently.”²⁵ This effectively reduces ‘mission command’ to the conduct of decentralized operations, positing that since both ‘mission command’ and ‘command by negation’ encourage decentralized execution of operations they represent equivalent approaches to command and control. Although both approaches to C2 do seek to promote decentralized execution, this argument discounts several other key aspects of command and control commonly used to differentiate varied C2 approaches. A detailed review of the various characteristics of these two approaches will facilitate a more thorough comparison and determine the credibility of equating the two.

Approaches to command and control can be compared using several commonly accepted methodologies. Individual methodologies classify different approaches to command and control according to a variety of characteristics. The *Marine Corps Doctrine Publication (MCDP) 6 – Command and Control* – provides one approach to evaluating various C2 systems.²⁶ MCDP 6 establishes a spectrum bounded between ‘mission-type’ C2 and ‘detailed’ C2, using seven specific categories and approximately twenty-two subjective

²⁵ JP 3-32, I-2.

²⁶ U.S. Marine Corps. *Command and Control*. Marine Corps Doctrine Publication (MCDP) 6. (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, 1996), 81.

variables to assist in classifying a specific C2 approach along the spectrum.²⁷ David Alberts and Richard E. Hayes provide a more objective tool for the comparison of different approaches to C2 by analyzing the type of orders required by various command and control approaches. Martin van Crevald provides a third and simpler alternative to evaluating an organizations C2 approach. Crevald argues that when confronted with a problem, an organization either reacts by attempting to increase its' information-processing capacity, or re-designs the organization to operate with less information. 'Detailed' command approaches usually support the former, while 'mission command' approaches support the latter. Using these three methods to compare 'mission command' and 'command by negation', it is possible to better determine the legitimacy of claiming the interchangeability of these approaches.

The Response to Uncertainty

The first method will evaluate command and control approaches based on their response to uncertainty. Uncertainty is a fundamental aspect of the nature of war.²⁸ Conflicts between belligerents create a complex, adaptive system in which a limitless array of variables interact to limit predictability. Joint operational doctrine acknowledges the persistence of ambiguity, uncertainty, and surprise as a common operating precept.²⁹ Crevald argues that leaders employ C2 approaches in response to the fundamental uncertainty of conflict in only one of two distinct ways; leaders either attempt to reduce uncertainty to increase the probability of success, or they attempt to minimize or eliminate

²⁷ The term 'mission-type' C2 is used here to differentiate the idealized command philosophy from the joint doctrinal concept of 'mission command'.

²⁸ Clausewitz. *On War*, Chapter 6.

²⁹ JP 3-0, I-3.

the level of certainty required to succeed.³⁰ This basic dichotomy becomes the starting point for our comparison of ‘mission command’ and ‘command by negation’.

A ‘certainty seeking’ approach attempts to reduce uncertainty by attempting to achieve as close an approximation of certainty possible.³¹ In an attempt to overcome the fundamental nature of war, a ‘certainty-seeking’ approach relies on formalized systems of command and control capable of processing massive quantities of data, often heavily enabled by technology, to provide near-certainty to a centralized commander. This approach may rely on extensive, centralized operational planning, direct tactical control by operational or strategic leaders, or a combination of both to control uncertainty and attempt to bring order to chaos.³² ‘Certainty-seeking’ command approaches attempt to increase order and certainty to improve predictability and reduce the complex, interactive system characteristic of conflict to a merely complicated system that can be understood and logically manipulated by commanders. The focus on creating certainty characterizes this approach.

In contrast, a ‘uncertainty-accepting approach accepts that uncertainty cannot be controlled. In response to persistent uncertainty, commanders develop and employ command and control systems that reduce or eliminate the need for certainty as a pre-requisite to operational success.³³ In this way, ‘uncertainty accepting’ approaches to command and control attempt to redesign the system to better mitigate uncertainty instead of seeking to control or reduce it. Command and control systems that accept uncertainty recognize the need for resiliency following the inevitable degradation of control that results from

³⁰ Martin van Creveld. *Command in War*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 269.

³¹ MCDP 6, 80.

³² Higgins. *Future Warfare and the Viability of Command by Negation*, 3.

³³ U.S. Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Mission Command White Paper*, 3-4.

interaction with a complex, adaptive system. The focus on accepting uncertainty characterizes this approach.

The joint concept of ‘mission command’ more closely resembles an ‘uncertainty accepting’ approach. The ‘mission command’ approach clearly acknowledges that the fundamental uncertainty of military operations cannot be overcome to an acceptable degree when constrained by time, the operational environment, and the enemy.³⁴ In response to the unpredictability engendered by uncertainty, ‘mission command’ attempts to redesign the joint force to mitigate – not eliminate – uncertainty.³⁵ The ‘mission command’ approach redesigns the system by delegating decision-making authority to the lowest level possible, eliminating or reducing the need to provide the unattainable levels of certainty required to conduct centrally controlled operations.³⁶ The ‘mission command’ approach clearly seeks to reduce the level of certainty required to conduct successful operations.

In contrast, the ‘command by negation’ approach more closely resembles the characteristics of the ‘certainty seeking’ approach. The ‘command by negation’ approach leverages a robust communication network to enable a complex CWC construct to reduce uncertainty, optimize asset management, and coordinate action between subordinates. The knowledge developed by the CWC empowers the ability of operational commanders to negate the decisions of less informed subordinates, as required.³⁷ The CWC construct relies heavily on network enabled instantaneous and constant communication to centrally

³⁴ Helmuth von Moltke. *Moltke on the Art of War: Selected Writings*, ed. Daniel J. Hughes. (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1993), 92.

³⁵ U.S. Army. *Mission Command*. Army Doctrinal Publication 6-0. (Washington, D.C.: May 2012), 1.

³⁶ JP 3-0, I-7.

³⁷ McManus. “United States Navy Command and Control Organization.”, 10.

synchronize and prioritize actions across units and warfare areas.³⁸ This approach clearly assumes that the fundamental uncertainty of conflict can be overcome by the application of a command and control system. The demonstrated variance in how the two approaches respond to uncertainty undermines the claim that ‘command by negation’ and ‘mission-command’ represent an equivalent approach to command and control.

The Command and Control Spectrum

The next method of comparing C2 approaches utilizes the command and control spectrum developed in MCDP 6. This spectrum bounds the potential approaches to C2 between ‘detailed command’ on one extreme and ‘mission-type’ command on the other.³⁹ Table I provides the characteristics represented by these two theoretically idealized approaches to C2.

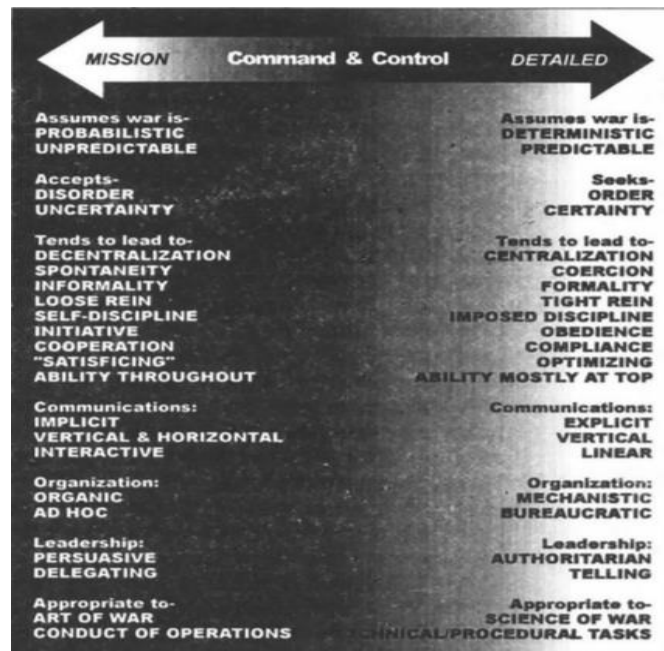


Table I: The Command and Control Spectrum

³⁸ U.S. Office of the Chief of Naval Operations. *Composite Warfare Doctrine*. Navy Warfare Publication (NWP) 3-56. (Washington, D.C.: September 2010), Chapter 2.

³⁹ ‘Mission-type’ is used here to differentiate the theoretical concept representing one extreme of the spectrum from the operationalized concept of ‘mission command’ used by the joint force.

The ‘mission command’ approach clearly lies to the left of center on the spectrum detailed in Table I. This approach tends to result in the decentralization of planning, control, and execution.⁴⁰ Instead of centralized planning and direction, mission command relies on intent to encourage the spontaneous exercise of disciplined initiative. Control is exercised through intent, and leaders trust subordinates to make satisficing – yet timely – decisions based on changing conditions. The perfectly executed or optimized plan is sacrificed for the decent plan immediately executed⁴¹ Communication occurs both horizontally and vertically, but only as often as possible in a contested or denied communications environment. ‘Mission command’ requires highly capable leaders at all levels of command.⁴² These characteristics clearly place the ‘mission command’ approach on the ‘mission type’ end of the spectrum.

Conversely, the ‘command by negation’ approach, operationalized by the CWC construct, more closely resembles the ‘detailed’ command characteristics described on the right of the spectrum in Table I. While both ‘mission command’ and ‘command by negation’ enable decentralized execution, the underlying requirement to seek approval required by ‘command by negation’ implies centralized control.⁴³ The CWC construct formalizes the decision-making process, imposes discipline through explicit vertical communication links, and focuses the decision-making ability and support functions hierarchically to produce optimized results. The CWC construct creates a combat bureaucracy that relies on

⁴⁰ Woody W. Parramore. “Defining Centralized Execution in Order to Recognize Decentralized Execution.” *Air and Space Power Journal* 18, no. 3 (2004), 26.

⁴¹ Nelsen. "Auftragstaktik: A Case for Decentralized Battle.", 24.

⁴² U.S. Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Mission Command White Paper*, 6.

⁴³ McManus. “United States Navy Command and Control Organization.”, 12.

mechanistic processes that stifles initiative in favor of optimized solutions.⁴⁴ Like the previous method, this comparison further demonstrates that the concepts of ‘mission command’ and ‘command by negation’ differ in significant ways.

Order Requirements

Alberts and Hayes provide a third method for evaluating the conceptual compatibility of ‘mission command’ and ‘command by negation’. They identified three primary approaches to command and control, classified by the relative level of detail provided in the orders produced by the approach. ‘Mission-specific’ orders contained very little detail beyond the mission and intent, requiring subordinate commanders to determine how to conduct operations. Conversely, ‘order-specific’ systems provided very detailed specificity on how missions would be accomplished. These two approaches are analogous to the opposing archetypes of ‘mission-type’ and ‘detailed’ command and control systems discussed on the spectrum in Table I. Alberts and Hayes’ provide a third, more centrist, approach to command and control – the ‘objective-specific’ approach. This approach blends aspects of ‘mission-type’ and ‘detailed’ command philosophies to realize the benefits of delegated authority while retaining the ability to synchronize effects required by multi-domain operations.

⁴⁴ Andrew Beeler. “Distributed Lethality Requires Distributing AUTHORITY”. *Proceedings* Vol. 143. (January, 2017), 54-55.

Orders Specificity Type	Command Approach Sub-type	Example	C2 capacity	Detail of updates	Frequency of updates	Competency required	Initiative required
Mission specific	Control free	German Blitzkrieg	Very low	Low	Low	Very High	Very High
Mission specific	Selective control	Israeli Army 1956, 1967, 1973	Low	Low	Very High	High	High
Objective specific	Problem bounding	British Army	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	High
Objective specific	Problem solving	Post WW II U.S. Army and Navy	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Order specific	Interventionist	Post WW II Soviet	Very High	High	Very High	Medium/Low	Low
Order specific	Cyclic	Post WW II PLA, USAF ATO	High	High	Very Low	Low	Very Low

Table II: Comparison of Different Approaches to C2⁴⁵

According to Alberts and Hayes, the post-World War II United States Navy's C2 philosophy represented an 'objective-specific' approach. As both 'command by negation' and the CWC construct remain as the defining characteristics of Navy C2 doctrine, this broad categorization remains valid today. However, technological and tactical changes occurring over the intervening decades altered some of the other characteristics Alberts and Hayes used to describe the Navy's C2 approach. The network-centric warfare model enabled by advances in communication technology that require real-time communication between many elements to enable the kill chain increases the frequency and detail of updates required from medium to very high. The increasingly automated systems, combined with the centralized decision-making authority retained by a 'negating commander' and operationalized by the CWC, in turn, reduces the collective decision-making competency required at subordinate

⁴⁵ Modified from David Alberts and Richard E. Hayes, *Command Arrangements for Peace Operations* (Washington D.C.: CCRP Publication Series, 19950), 68 and 74.

levels. The C2 capacity remains unchanged, but still reflects a much higher requirement than that required for ‘mission-specific’ approaches.

The current joint ‘mission command’ approach is more representative of the ‘mission-specific’ approaches used by the Wehrmacht in WWII, or the Israeli Army from the 1950’s to the 1970’s. This approach is based on the use of mission-type orders.⁴⁶ “Mission command’ minimizes the need for C2 capacity, but like the Israeli’s, maintains the ability to exercise more detailed command as necessary.⁴⁷ The near constant need for updates, facilitated by network-centric communication technology, more closely resembles the high frequency of updates required by the Israeli’s, but the very high levels of initiative and competency mirror the requirements of the control-free, mission-specific command and control system of the Wehrmacht. Overall, the joint concept of ‘mission command’ clearly represents a ‘mission-specific’ style of command and control, while ‘command by negation’ more clearly represents an ‘objective-specific’ style.

Differing Approaches Create Differing Outcomes

Each of the three comparisons above demonstrate that ‘mission command’ and ‘command by negation’ are not analogous command and control approaches. As fundamentally different approaches, it is unlikely that ‘mission command’ and ‘command by negation’ will produce analogous results. Based on the characteristics examined above, ‘command by negation’ increases decisional transaction costs, decreasing the ability to attack effectively first. Instead of leveraging a C2 philosophy and supporting systems to decrease decisional transaction costs, the application of ‘command by negation’ and the CWC

⁴⁶ JP 3-0, xi.

⁴⁷ Benjamin Cone. *Mission Command and Anti-access/Area-denial: Implications for Joint Command and Control*. (Newport, RI: Naval War College Joint Military Operations Department, 2013), 10.

construct increases the likelihood of sub-optimal outcomes in three distinct ways. First, emphasis on centralized decision by the composite warfare commander imposes physical distance between the problem and the decision-maker, increasing the time required to complete the kill chain while increasing the reliance on vulnerable communication networks. Secondly, information processing and analysis costs increase proportionally with distance from the problem environment, leading to less timely and often less informed decisions.⁴⁸ Lastly, reliance on centralized command philosophies and systems stifles the initiative required to make decisions when the chaos, tempo, scale, and scope of combat eventually overwhelms operational commanders precluding effective central control; familiarization with rapid decision making is a pre-requisite for success.⁴⁹

‘Command by negation’ will also impede the development of disciplined initiative by undermining the characteristics required to encourage independent action by subordinates. Trust must characterize the relationship between subordinates and commanders for initiative to thrive. The default approval requirement for all action implied under the concept of ‘command by negation’ creates a subordinate-leader dynamic that implies a lack of trust. The centralized control and coordination affected by the composite warfare commanders further implies a lack of trust in subordinates’ ability. If perceived as micromanagement by subordinates, such formalized systems can dangerously erode trust.⁵⁰ By creating a climate of distrust, subordinates lack the confidence required to develop a habit of action.

Doctrine Drives Force Generation, Training, Education, and Personnel Management

To fully operationalize a ‘mission command’ approach, the Navy must first revise their command and control doctrine to fully implement the tenets of mission command.

⁴⁸ Feltey and Madden. “The Challenge of Mission Command.”

⁴⁹ U.S. Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Mission Command White Paper*, 7

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

Doctrine drives force generation, training, education, and personnel management. GEN Dempsey and GEN Casey realized this when they rewrote Army doctrine in 2009 to replace ‘command and control’ with ‘mission command.’ This case is illustrative, because GEN’s Casey and Dempsey realized the importance of using specific words to illustrate a concept. Both agreed that the term ‘command and control’ had developed a technology-centric undertone that undermined their vision to highlight the importance of the commander to any command and control system.⁵¹ On that basis, GENs Casey and Dempsey revised the doctrine as the starting point for affecting further change across the force.

Unfortunately, joint doctrine has little direct effect on service-retained force provider priorities. GEN Dempsey’s attempt to influence the services through joint doctrine revision and his Mission Command White Paper failed to produce uniform acceptance.⁵² As Dempsey’s actions in 2009 indicate, change must occur at the service level, implemented by service-chiefs, using doctrine revision as the primary agent of change. As Admiral King’s experience in 1941 demonstrated, directives may not be enough.⁵³ Although his CINCLANT Serials of 1941 clearly stressed a ‘mission command’ approach, Admiral King’s failure to institutionalize his directive manifested itself clearly in the failures caused by the detailed command and control exercised by Callaghan and others at Guadalcanal over a year later.⁵⁴ An additional three years of war were required to fully forge leaders capable of implementing King’s vision. The costly learning curve of the Pacific Theater should serve as a warning,

⁵¹ Clinton J. Ancker, III. “The Evolution of Mission Command in U.S. Army Doctrine, 1905 to the Present.” *Military Review*. (March-April 2013), 51.

⁵² The persistence of the concepts of ‘centralized planning, decentralized control’ a ‘command by negation’ are a testament to difficulty of imposing top-down changes on service doctrine.

⁵³ Ernest J. King. “Cinclant Serial 053 and 038 dated 21 January 1941 and 22 April 1941”, in Thomas B. Buell. *Masters of Sea Power: A Biography of Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King*. (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1980), Appendix I.

⁵⁴ Mark Stille. *The Naval Battle for Guadalcanal 1942: Clash for Supremacy in the Pacific*. (New York, Osprey 2013), 58.

encouraging the doctrinal revisions capable of driving the institutional change required to fully embrace ‘mission command’.

Any revisions conducted must meet two criteria. First, the revision must be comprehensive. All aspects of the command and control philosophy and systems doctrine must be changed to ensure that the operating and generating force clearly receive the message. To support this effort, mention of command by negation must be eliminated and language must be revised to reflect the joint force vision of mission command. Recent naval doctrinal efforts seem to already be moving in this direction. The December 2013 edition of NWP 5-01 Navy Planning clearly echoes the vocabulary and the intent of the joint mission command doctrine.⁵⁵ Secondly, the revisions must explicitly describe the vision for implementing a new command and control system. ADP 6 provides a detailed description of the traits and characteristics required to achieve the end-state.

Thorough revisions, reinforced by service-chief directives, would drive sweeping selection, training, education, and personnel management changes. Leaders would be assessed and selected into the service based on their propensity to exercise disciplined initiative. Training would better replicate the uncertain and chaotic nature of conflict, present leaders with opportunities to practice rapid decision making in an information rich environment, facilitate the exercise of disciplined initiative by subordinates, and encourage leaders to empower subordinates by avoiding micromanagement. Training must also reinforce trust by allowing commanders and subordinates alike the opportunity to learn and grow from mistakes, not be punished for them. Navy-specific training should incorporate

⁵⁵ Office of the Chief of Naval Operations. *Navy Planning*. Navy Warfare Publication 5-01. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), 2013.

U.S. Marine Corps. *Command and Control*. Marine Corps Doctrine Publication (MCDP) 6. (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, 1996), 81.

network-optional warfare at every opportunity, simulating ‘dark battle’ as another method of forcing the exercise of disciplined initiative.⁵⁶ Increasing the frequency of training events where surface action groups operate independently of the carrier strike group and outside the control of the CWC not only increases ‘mission command’ familiarity, but also supports the move toward the distributed lethality operating concept.⁵⁷

Doctrinal revision would enable educational system changes as well. Professional military education would increasingly emphasize critical thinking, leadership, and self-assessment. Leaders at all levels would be increasingly encouraged to develop their subordinates, and in so doing, developing greater levels of familiarity and trust. As a further enabler of trust, the personnel management system would evolve to promote leaders that exhibit the leader attributes required under mission command while also giving mid-level leaders greater ability to build their leader-teams. This would further incentivize success, and allow organizations to take advantage of the trust benefit accrued through long association.⁵⁸

Final Remarks

Despite arguments to the contrary, current Navy C2 doctrine fails to fully embrace the concept of ‘mission command’. Instead, the Navy’s C2 construct promotes a more ‘detailed’ concept of command and control that imposes decisional transaction costs on operations that negatively impact a forces ability to attack effectively first. Although detailed command philosophies and centralized control systems offer distinct advantages by enabling high levels of synchronization and minimizing risks in environments where uncertainty can be

⁵⁶ Daniel Stefanus. “Embracing the Dark Battle: Electronic Warfare, Distributed Lethality, and the Future of Naval Warfighting.” *Proceedings*, Vol 143. (April 2017), 27-31.

⁵⁷ Beeler. “Distributed Lethality Requires Distributing AUTHORITY.”, 55.

⁵⁸ Nelsen. "Auftragstaktik: A Case for Decentralized Battle.", 26.

largely controlled, such philosophies and systems require little training.⁵⁹ For, as Jackie Fischer famously said, “any fool can obey an order.”⁶⁰ However, when the fog and friction of war rapidly overcomes the capability of both networks and their limited band-width end-users, leaders at all levels will be required to rapidly observe, orient, decide, and act to retain the ability to attack effectively first, if it has not already been ceded to the enemy. Without capable leaders – selected, trained, educated, and managed under the auspices of mission-type command and control doctrine – the likelihood of success in an increasingly complex operating environment is greatly diminished. For this reason, it is imperative that the Navy revises its’ command and control doctrine to fully support the tenets of ‘mission command’ while the time still exists to implement the follow-on changes required to fully operationalize the concept.

⁵⁹ James W. Harvard. “Airmen and Mission Command.” *Air and Space Journal* 27.2 (March/April 2013), 133-4.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Michael Symanski. “Any Fool Can Obey An Order”. *Modern War Institute* (March, 2017), 1.

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